REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated April 27, 2009. Claims 1, 3 to 5, 7, 8, 10, 13 to 16 and 19 are pending in the application, with Claims 17 and 18 having been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter and without conceding the correctness of any rejection applied against them. Claims 1 and 16 are the independent claims. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

Claims 1 and 16 to 18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph, for alleged failure to comply with the written description requirement. According to the Office Action, there is insufficient support in the specification for "registering the feature data acquired in step (b) in an index file". Applicant submits that support for this feature is found in the specification at, for example, page 17, lines 6 to 14. Nevertheless, in an effort to advance prosecution, and without conceding the correctness of this rejection, the rejection is believed to have been attended to by the amendment above, in which "registration of feature data" is deleted from the claims. Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 3 to 5, 7, 8, 10 13 and 15 to 19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,911,139 (Jain), U.S. Publication No. 2002/0106135 (Iwane), U.S. Patent No. 6,961,463 (Loui), U.S. Publication No. 2002/0176116 (Rhoads), U.S. Patent No. 7,127,106 (Neil) and U.S. Publication No. 2003/0120650 (Wills). Reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are respectfully requested.

Independent Claims 1 and 16 generally concern storing an input image in a database. An original is scanned to generate an input image. First search information

associated with the input image is acquired on the basis of information input by a user, and feature data contained in the input image is acquired as second search information. If pointer information is detected from the input image, the original data file is searched for using the pointer information. On the other hand, if the pointer information is not detected from the input image, the original data file is searched for using the first and second search information.

According to one aspect of Claims 1 and 16, the search information input by the user is registered in an index file, regardless of whether the original data file is or is not found by the search. The index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file.

By virtue of this arrangement, it is ordinarily possible to improve search performance. In particular, even in a case where an original data file corresponding to an input image is found by a search, registering the information in the index file can ordinarily improve the speed of the next search.

Referring specifically to claim language, independent Claim 1 is directed to an image processing method executed by an image processing apparatus having a scan function which scans an original. The method includes (a) scanning the original to generate an input image, and (b) acquiring first search information associated with the input image on the basis of search information input by a user. The method also includes (c) acquiring feature data contained in the input image as second search information, and attempting to detect pointer information from the input image indicating a storage location of an original data file in the database. In addition, the method includes (d) searching for the original data file corresponding to the input image in the database using the pointer

information in a case that the pointer information is detected in step (c), and searching for the original data file using the first and second search information in a case that the pointer information is not detected in step (c). The method also includes (e) converting the input image into outline data and storing the outline data in the database, in a case where the original data file corresponding to the input image is not found in step (d), wherein the outline data indicates a visual representation of a tracing of the outline of a character or a graphic object, and (f) declining to store the input image data into the database, in a case that the original data file corresponding to the input image is found in step (d). The method further includes (g) registering the search information input by the user in step (b) in an index file regardless of whether the original data file corresponding to the input image is or is not found in step (d). The index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file.

Independent Claim 16 is directed to an apparatus substantially in accordance with the method of Claim 1.

The applied art is not seen to disclose or suggest the features of independent Claims 1 and 16, and in particular is not seen to disclose or suggest at least the feature of registering search information input by a user in an index file, wherein the index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file.

Page 6 of the Office Action concedes that Jain, Iwane, Loui and Rhodes fail to disclose registering information input by a user in an index file, wherein the index file is used in a next search for an original data file. Applicant agrees, and submits that it logically follows that Jain, Iwane, Loui and Rhoads also do not disclose or suggest

registering search information input by a user in an index file, wherein the index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file.

Nevertheless, the Office Action relies on Neil (Column 1, lines 65 to 66) for registering input information in an index file. As understood by Applicant, Neil is directed to fingerprinting a first image and a second image, and using the fingerprints of the first and second images to determine if the second image is derived from the first image. See Neil, Abstract.

However, the cited portions of Neil simply disclose that images may be indexed or categorized based on visual features, text annotation, assigned subjects, or image types. See Neil, Column 1, lines 65 to 66. As thus understood, Neil indexes images and not registered search information input by a user. Therefore, Neil is not seen to disclose or suggest registering search information input by a user in an index file, wherein the index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file.

Wills is not seen to remedy the deficiencies of Jain, Iwane, Louis, Rhoads and Neil. As understood by Applicant, Wills discloses a technique for scanning source documents and creating index entries for geographical terms in the source documents. Thus, in one aspect, Wills creates an index form from a scanned image. See Wills, Abstract and paragraph [0031].

Page 7 of the Office Action asserts that Wills (paragraph [0031]) discloses using an index file in a next search for an original data file. However, Wills is not seen to disclose or suggest registering search information input by a user in an index file, wherein

the index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file.

Therefore, independent Claims 1 and 16 are believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is respectfully requested.

The other claims in the application are each dependent from the independent claims and are believed to be allowable over the applied references for at least the same reasons. Because each dependent claim is deemed to define an additional aspect of the claims, however, the individual consideration of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.